

EARLY INDUSTRIES IN PERRY COUNTY*

By

PAUL RICH

I

Intermingled with the history of Perry County are some widely interesting and picturesque industries, many of which are now extinct. Mining played a predominant part; almost the whole story of coal mining being enveloped in the mines here. The county can boast of having had nearly every kind of coal mine known. There were shaft mines of many different sizes, slope mines, and in recent years, strip mines. The largest shovel in the world is working in the coal fields west of Du Quoin now. Milling, lumbering, and salt wells were also important. The Blakeslee Machine Company held a unique position, because it would compete with modern factories in equipment, and surpass many in the number of really useful machines invented. The first topic will be the old slope mine in St. John.

II

ST. JOHN SLOPE

In St. John, just across the railroad tracks from the old store there, the Haliday Company attempted to drill a shaft mine. A dispute arose with the railroad company about an entry which would have to be driven across the tracks.

*This essay was awarded first prize in the 1933 statewide competition conducted jointly by the Illinois State Historical Society and the Daughters of the American Revolution, Illinois Chapter.

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The railroad company defeated the plan, thereby making a shaft mine very inconvenient. The company decided to sink a slope mine instead. The two main entries were driven into the ground directly eastward, and were about thirty feet apart, with a crosscut for air about every fifty feet. Every bit of the entries was dug by hand, with the aid of hand drills (commonly known as churn drills), sledges, and picks. These entries were about eight feet wide with a vein of coal between six and seven feet thick. The greater part of these entries was cross-timbered to hold the roof, but in spite of these precautions, hot weather often loosened large slugs which fell, causing no little trouble to the workers. Each entry had six cut-offs or cross-entries about fifty yards apart. Each was called by the name of the man who worked it, such as McMann's, Oglivie's, Ferguson's and Jack Van's entries. In all, the mine extended under a territory about a half-mile square.

The outside works of the mine were not very extensive. The coal was hauled up the tipple in cars on a narrow gauge track. This was not very safe to the workers. In the process of dumping the coal, when the car reached the tipple, the couplings being weak, the cars sometimes broke loose and hurtled down the narrow rail. A man named Mike Fitzgerald was killed by one of these runaway cars. Almost every bit of slack was taken from the coal and was hauled to a slackpile a short distance away in mule carts. This slack hill is still on the site of the mine and gives evidence of the extensive work done.

The coal was taken out entirely by hand. Each man had to shoot his own coal. This was accomplished in a crude but effective way. A hole was bored into the coal about three inches deep and was filled with black powder. A fuse (called a greasetail) was made by twisting waxed paper. One end of this was put into the powder, and then a small rock was driven into the hole, as a wedge, to keep

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the paper from burning too fast. When this was lit, the worker "beat it." There was no loud explosion, only a "pss-t" sound followed by the falling of the coal. The men then returned to load the coal. They loaded it into cars which held twenty bushels. All of the coal had to be cleaned by hand-riddles before it was taken from the mine. If there was as much as a double handful of dust or slack in a car, the men were fined. This extra precaution insured coal absolutely free of dirt.

During the Civil War the men were paid six cents for every bushel of coal they took out of the mines, and even in those times when coal was scarce, that was a preposterously high wage. It was possible for a worker to load as many as eleven twenty-bushel cars, making his wage for the day about thirteen dollars and twenty cents.¹ The miners were receiving so much money that it was almost impossible to get them to work overtime. They would rather gather around saloons and such places after working hours and waste their money. It was a very familiar scene to see two miners in a drunken brawl, fighting in the streets. Their pay was reduced to five cents a bushel at one time, so they went on a nine months' strike.

The track system in the mine was of an antiquated type. The rails were fashioned from wood with a strip of iron fastened on top to prevent splintering. The switches were made of iron, but were far from perfect.

At the present time a strip mine is working just east of the slope mines. Recently one of the shovels dug into the end of one of the main entries. This shows how shallow these old mines were and gives a better idea of their work.

There was another slope mine about two miles from St. John, but it was not as large, and did not work nearly so many men.

¹Wage scale given by Sam Barton, a miner of the old slope mine.

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SHAFT MINES

The shaft mines are not as appealing to us, because they are common now, and were worked and run similar to the present-day ones, but were usually on a smaller scale. They were also drilled by hand, the rock being beaten into small pieces by sledges. The last mine on the prairie to be sunk by hand was the "Holden" shaft. The average size of the shaft of such mines was eight by sixteen feet and from forty to eighty feet deep. In these shallow mines there was no danger from explosion of gas. The only danger was that of black damp caused by insufficient supply of oxygen. Each shaft had two cages, one which came up while the other went down, which were raised and lowered by a small donkey engine. At the bottom of this shaft were the regular entries running in different directions, each with its track. Oil lamps were used then as carbide lamps were still unknown.

Managers of mines were required to work two years in the mines in other than shift work, but in spite of this many were incompetent. A new manager, who was not experienced enough, often made the mistake of trying to take coal out too rapidly thereby causing "squeezes".² These resulted in great losses, not only to the output, but also to the regular mine operations.

Strikes were not so common then as now. Each mine had its own union, but there were no great efforts to form one great union until many years later. Several small unions joined together at first, then finally joined with a large union at Belleville.

HORN'S MINE AND OLD MIDDLE MINE

Horn's mine sold a great deal of coal to the Red X Railroad Company. They paid for this with land in Arkansas

²Statement made by William Swafford, who worked in every mine but two in Perry County and many other states.

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which had been given to them by the government as an inducement for building their roads. The Old Middle mine was on the spot where the foundry is now. About forty years ago, a good while after it had been closed, the city decided to cut into it to get water to sprinkle the streets. After a hole was drilled³ through, the water rose to within eight feet of the surface, giving an excessive supply of water.

OTHER MINES

Some other mines which are not so important were the Tissue mines, the New Enterprise, from which sand was taken for building purposes, Greenwood's and Browning's mines which supply the water for DuQuoin, the old Eagle mine above St. John, Sam Eaton mines, the Egyptian mine, the Old Lake, the Excelsior, Goddard's mine at Sunfield, and Union Mine No. 2. From 1880-1890 the average pay in those mines was from two dollars to two dollars and fifty cents a day.

III

SALT WELLS IN ST. JOHN

Another thriving industry was the salt wells at St. John. There were seven of these wells at one time. The largest, however, produced most of the salt. The salt trust bought up these wells so that it would have a monopoly on the salt industry.

The largest of these wells used a seven inch pipe to pump the salt water from the underground stream. Large pumps pumped the water into huge reservoirs. Then the water was pumped into boilers. There were about fourteen of them, each covering a ten foot space. Copper pipes ran

³W. Swafford drilled into the old mine after another man had given up as too dangerous.

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through these by which the water was heated. After most of the water was evaporated, the salt was put on drying boards to get thoroughly dried. Then it was taken to the refinery and prepared for the market.

At one time this was a very progressive industry employing a great number of men, but other huge deposits of salt were found in other states and it was found that the salt could be sold much more cheaply so the wells gradually dried out, and in 1904 gave way to newer and better mines.

IV

SPRIGG GRIST MILL

Ben Sprigg owned and operated a grist mill in DuQuoin. He made a small mine of his own to furnish coal to run his mill. He took coal from under the location of the J. B. Ward School. His mill was quite large for that time, and was operated by steam.

RED HOOP MILL

The Red Hoop Mill, owned by Kimmel and Onstot, was the largest mill in Perry County. It ground most of the grain for farmers, and also shipped thousands and thousands of barrels of flour. It burned to the ground in 1924 in one of the most spectacular fires ever seen here. The firemen were on duty for twenty-four hours⁴, yet practically nothing was salvaged.

THE APPLE DRYING COMPANY

The apple drying company was successful for two summers. It handled from fifteen to twenty carloads of apples a day and in the busiest season employed more than twenty

⁴This happened while the department was using city pressure, otherwise a greater part might have been saved.

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girls. The company had some trouble, closed the factory, and left.

V

BLAKESLEE MANUFACTURING COMPANY

The Blakeslee Manufacturing Company at one time had promise of being one of DuQuoin's leading industries, but poor management caused it to be closed about thirty years ago. It specialized in many kinds of machinery, especially in pumps. The factory was divided into a moulding department, pattern shop, and all the departments necessary for making every part of the many different machines. About thirty men were employed, the highest pay besides that of the foreman was two dollars a day⁵.

A. J. Blakeslee, the owner of the plant, was a successful inventor. He invented and made the first veneering machine, which was used in Cobden for making strawberry boxes and other things. He also invented the jet pump, made Duplex pumps, nearly all smaller types of engines, and saw mill engines.

MISCELLANEOUS

George Pugh's marble shop was quite large at one time with five men employed. Ward Brothers were owners of the largest livery business ever in DuQuoin. A small laundry in the northeast portion of DuQuoin flourished for a while, but soon went out of business. The Eaton machine shop was a progressive industry, but it did not come up to the standard of Blakeslee's.

Perry County, although not ranking high among the leaders now in the number of interesting industries, was

⁵Ed Wright started working there as a foreman for \$4.85 a week.

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literally a beehive of them in its early days. Its citizens should be proud of this old record, and should try to bring it back to, and even above its old standard. The study of the old industries is an education in itself, and gives one a broader view of the industrial workings of our country. May our county flourish in every way in the future, thereby presenting a past even more interesting than this one!

NOTE

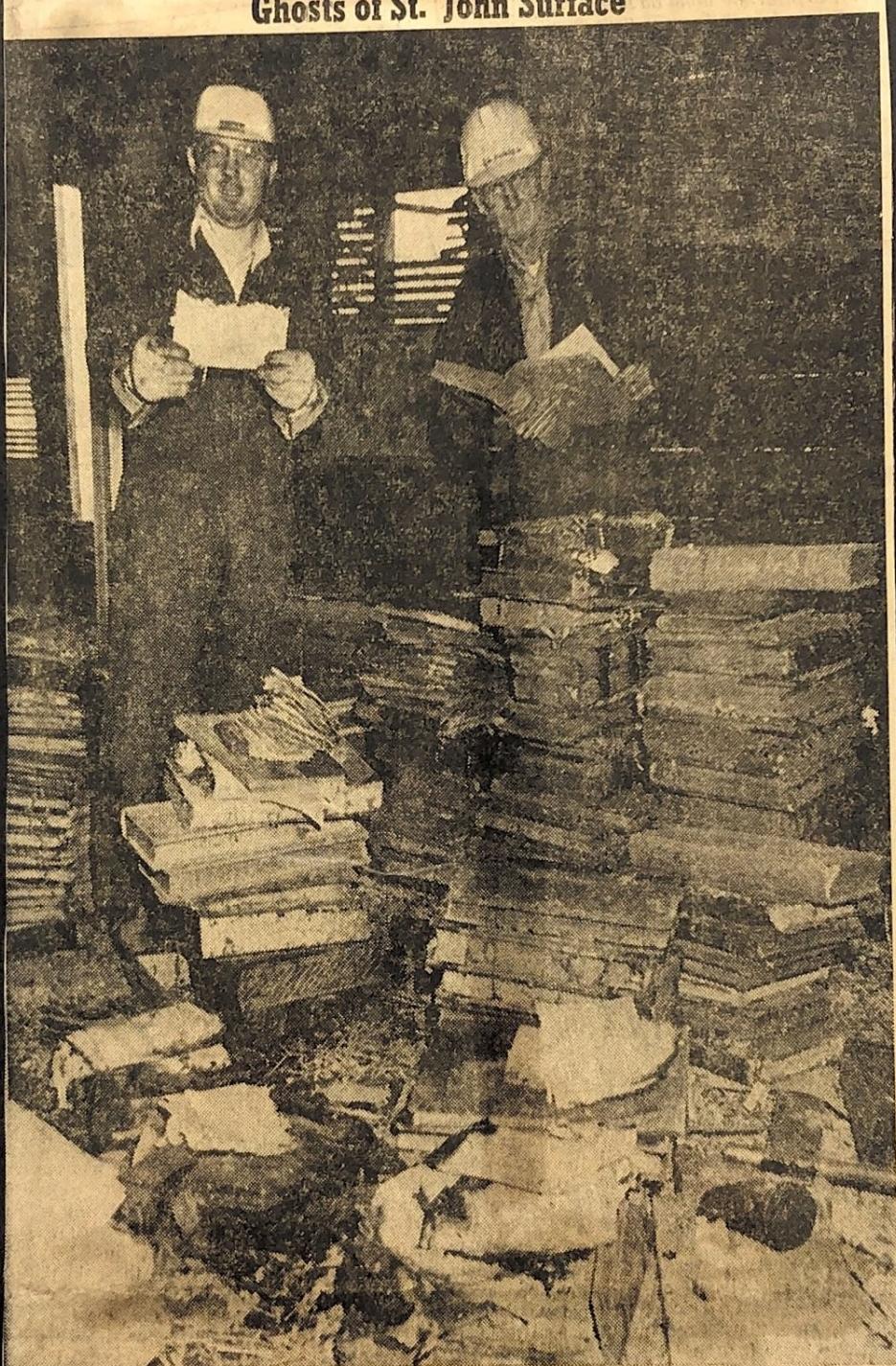
I wish to acknowledge my debt to the following men: Sam Barton, who worked in St. John slope mine, Horn's Mine, Paradise slope, Goddard's Mine and Davis' Mine; Miles McCollum, who worked in Tissue Mine, St. John slope mine, Eagle Mine, Browning Mines, Greenwood Mines, Majestic Mines, Forestor's Mine; William Wilkison, whose experience included the Middle Mines, Old Man Dick, Goddard's Mine, Eagle Mine and Tissue Mine; William Swafford, who worked in every mine in Perry County except two; Howard Forestor, supervisor of salt wells; E. Wright, who worked in the Blakeslee Manufacturing Co.; Sam Clark; and E. Flynn, state supervisor of mines.

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Du Quoin Evening Call

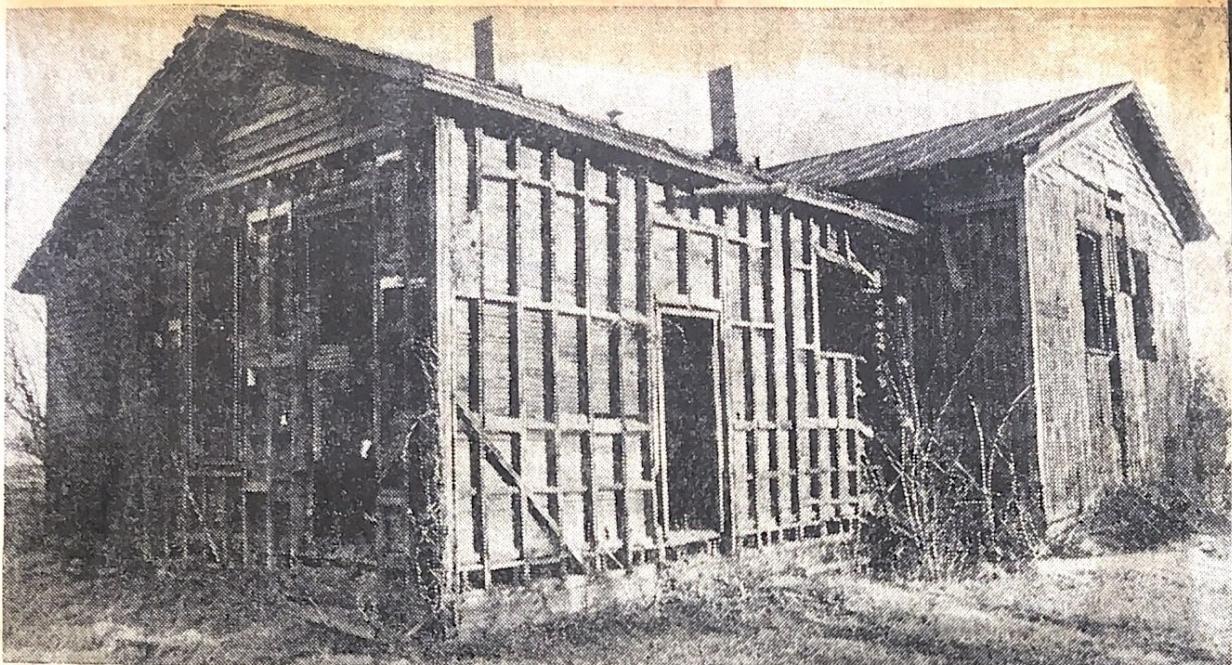
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 1976

Ghosts of St. John Surface



Bill Dunson (left) and his father Clarence Dunson scan the countless records of the St. John salt works and Illinois Central Iron and Coal Co. that were discovered Wednesday in a sealed vault in the old St. John's Store. The store, now only a ghost of a structure itself, is being demolished. It is the last visible effort of the labors of Captain W.P. Halliday. The records therein are priceless and tell of the thriving enterprise that existed.

Old St. John Store Taken Over By Age



The St. John's Store which has long since closed its business doors to the outside world, was once the center of activity, not only for the village, but for Du Quoin. The volume of trade in that store and the flow of money probably doubled the combined income of all Du Quoin merchants in the late 1800s and early 1900s. It will stand no longer. (Call Photo)

St. John History Surfaces As Workmen Break Into Store Vault; Records Go Back Into Mid-1800s

Mercantile Empire Of Halliday, Salt Works Uncovered As Ledger Entries Tell Of Area's Wealth

The ghosts of the Village of St. John — ghosts of a hundred years ago — have surfaced in the written artifacts of Captain W. P. Halliday, Johnny "Peg-leg" Forester, Sam Neely and others who had anything to do with the mercantile empire which once existed a stone's throw from Du Quoin.

Workmen who began the demolition of the last Oak and Poplar relic of another day — the St. John Store — Wednesday afternoon cut through a long forgotten walk-in vault in a side office area.

Therein and still relatively well preserved are records going back into the 1850s, 1860s and 70s which tell of the wealth of the area, some of it Halliday's wealth, which was acquired through the Illinois Central Coal and Iron Co., the salt works and St. John's Store.

Clarence Dunson and his son, Bill, had no idea what they were going to find when they cut through the front case-hardened door and snapped for the first time in 60 years the eight bolts which held the door closed. It was a big door, the finest that an Ohio vault maker could produce. The vault itself was shored on either side with Oak timbers with the bark still there.

"We had to cut all morning," the older Dunson said. "It was quite a job." A second smaller, but stronger, vault inside has yet to be opened. The combination knob gone and the tumblers rusted, it will take a specialist to open it without damaging the container itself.

It took all afternoon to extract the countless records that Halliday's bookkeepers accumulated over the years. Ledgers, day sheets, time logs, account books, correspondence and shipping orders over a 100 years old were there.

For instance, an account on a patron to the store by the name of Axley showed that six chairs could be bought in the store for \$6. His wife bought a dress for \$2.50. A finely keened razor went for \$3. Eyeglasses were 75-cents. A stove — and a good one — went for \$16. A mattress was \$2.50.

Correspondence told of delays in shipments for one reason or another of the salt and coal and coke which came from the enterprise. One man down near Halliday's "favorite town" of Cairo cancelled his coal order because of an "already overdue" account he had with Halliday.

It is all meticulously and painstakingly written in a hand that neither Palmer nor a modern day high school teacher would never know or ever be able to copy.

As nightfall came Dunson, who was contracted to tear down the structure for the property's most recent owner, was trying to find a local, county or Illinois historian who would insure that the records would be preserved. "I don't want them for myself, although the owner said I could have them," Dunson said.

"They should be preserved, though," he said. Because, part of the history they tell goes like this:

The Illinois Central Iron and Coal Mining Company was organized March 3, 1857, and their articles of association filed March 27 of that same year.

The capital stock was \$56,000 divided into 560 shares incorporated for 30 years.

The first directors and officers were Austin S. Tuttle, president; Alonzo W. Nason, secretary and treasurer; and Orrin J. Rose. This company began mining coal in 1857.

The coal vein dips at St. John and it was worked by digging a slope instead of sinking a shaft.

The town itself, was really established by Captain W. P. Halliday, an English sea captain, who had gathered his wealth from many lands.

He had much to do with the early development of Egypt. His favorite town, where he made his home, was Cairo because of the confluence of the Ohio and the Mississippi Rivers.

In 1867, Halliday purchased all the stock of the Illinois Central Iron and Coal Mining Company and assumed control and management of the mine. In the spring of 1873 a new slope was sunk, a mile and a quarter east.

Captain Halliday owned thousands of acres north of Du Quoin, and correspondence records recovered from the vault Wednesday are specific accounts of the transactions made during his many dealings.

Besides the extensive mining institutions, there was a farm consisting of 2,300 acres, 700 acres of which were under cultivation belonging to the works, all of which were owned and controlled by Halliday.

There were employed there about 350 men, including all the branches of the business.

Meanwhile, he operated hotels in a number of mid-western towns, among them the Halliday on South Washington in Du Quoin where Cliff's Filling Station reportedly stood, and the Halliday House in Cairo.

In 1870, while boring to examine the lower coal fields, a salt well was struck at the depth of 940 feet. Halliday at once saw the importance of this discovery and immediately began the erection of suitable buildings for the manufacture of salt, which were completed with machinery ready for use. In November 1873.

Countless records discovered Wednesday contain books with entries like "April 4, 1873 \$74.50 — repair work on coal elevator" the elevator which supplied fuel for the salt works.

Eventually, the flow of the salt wells were 20 to 30 barrels of salt water per minute which produced 150 barrels of salt per day. Four of the wells were 1,000 feet deep and the fifth was 3,800 feet.

Salt was made by drawing water into huge vats, then boiling it with stale butter. This combination was allowed to cool and stand for 24 hours while the salt settled to the bottom and the debris rose to the top.

The Salt Works ran the company store, the "St. John Store" in which the records were found. It served the entire community with family needs. The manager for many years was B. O. Cook. Most items were sold by the barrel or from barrels, the favorite packaging method of those times.

There was a cooperage (barrel factory) in connection with the Salt Works. Eleven men were employed and made approximately 700 barrels a day. Among the early coopers were Tom, Joe and Bill Davison. Barrels were sold, also, for packing and shipping flour, apples and vinegar.

A barrel of salt weighed 280 pounds and sold for \$1.25.

It's all there — or most of it anyway — and should some current or future historian be able to pick the ghosts from the entries, a great deal of St. John's history will have been recovered.

Friday, March 5, 1976

DU QUOIN (ILL.) EVENING CALL

Halliday Lived Until 1899, Cairo Home Still Stands

MORE LETTERS COME IN ON ST. JOHN

A Park Forest man, Andrew L. Russel, says that Captain William Parker Halliday was a river boat captain and not an English boat captain as reported in the history of St. John last week.

Russel's letter is only one of numerous inquiries, contributions and requests received by the Call since the discovery of records last week in the St. John Store.

Russel writes

"He (Halliday) was born in Rutland, Ohio, in 1827, the son of Samuel Halliday, who came to this country in 1818 from Dumphrieshire, Scotland, and Eliza Parker of Rutland. Eliza was, in turn, the daughter of William and Mary Marner Parker, early settler in Ohio.

"Captain Halliday died in Chicago in 1899 and is buried in Beech Grove Cemetery in Mounds, Ill., and the home he built, on Washington Avenue in Cairo, currently known as the "Rendleman House" is still beautifully maintained by the present owners.

"Captain Halliday's sister, Jane, was my maternal grandmother.

"More information about the "Captain" is in "The History of the City of Cairo, Illinois" by John M. Lansden, a copy of which is in the Cairo Public Library.

"Needless to say, he was quite a public spirited man, as were his brothers. He served Cairo in many ways.

"I hope to forward the requested copies of your most interesting article to some of his known relatives.

"Thanking you for your trouble, I remain very truly yours, Andrew L. Russel."

The first Perry County coal mine operated in 1853 and abandoned in 1939; known as Lowden, Langwith, North Side, Presswood and various other names.

